
Transgender Pride

A person I shall call "G." wrote:

Dear Gender Gifted Brothers and Sisters

Last thursday I visited a friend of mine who had her surgery two months ago. It was somewhat frustrating trying to communicate with her as she appeared rather depressed, or aggressive, or whatever, I don't know how to describe that kind of mood. I just knew her since shortly before her SRS, and obviously she was very happy in, looking forward to it. Her first reaction after the surgery was that now she was not a ts any more, now she could start living as a normal woman without having to think about all those problems. Now, two months later, she was rather angry (or how should I put it) about the fact that the neighbour's kids (for example) still call her "Sir" (I suppose they do that because it upsets her, which they find funny). I wonder if she seriously expected strangers to notice the difference. I don't think she's walking around naked in the neighbourhood.

She used to have two ts friends (other than me). One got her surgery some four months ago. She had (has?) a relationship to a guy who considers himself gay and tried to convince her not to have surgery because it would be the end of their relationship. At the hospital he showed up and said it was over, but since she didn't have anywhere else to stay she went to his place after the surgery anyway, and they continued the relationship. However, he told her that she would have to stop dress en femme etc. as he could only love her if he saw her as a man, and she apparently accepted that. So she broke up with all her ts friends (including my friend) because she had to live as a man.

I hope the story isn't true. Not only because it's terrible, but also because it would be bad PR for the relatively liberal Dutch SRS policy.

The other friend of hers send her a postcard last Christmas, in which he explained her that he had decided to halt HRT and live as a TV, and that he didn't want to have any contact with any ts people anymore.

Then she asked about how things are going between me and the gender clinic, and she came with the most incredible suggestions, obviously being somewhat out of her mind. One suggestion was that I should just go to Iran (where you can have anything if you have a credit card) and have the surgery done right away instead of going through this lasting Dutch SRS permission procedure. They would just give me an enormous doze of hormones which should be good for one year so that I wouldn't have to buy hormones on the black market.

The other suggestion was that since I don't parse it would be better to dress as a man. This is similar to some suggestion I got from this newsgroup when I complained about the difficulty of finding a job as a not-passible pre-everything ts. It was somewhat frustrating not being able to make her understand that while this stay-in-closet approach may work for a good actress in an

intolerant social environment, it is both impossible and unnecessary for me.

I think I will try to explain it to her in letter. It is sometimes difficult to talk when you are a little but pissed of with each other. And Dutch is a foreign language for both of us.

Thanks for reading this.

G.

I responded:

Hi G.,

This is a very sad story that you have told. Thank you for sharing, even if it is so painful.

It does bring up some difficult issues related to surgery. Surgery really does only two things. Obviously, it makes significant changes to one's genitals. Second, to the degree that one's self-image is tied to one's body, one's self-image will change. But that's it. There is no magic. Surgery does not change your past. Any human being who rejects such a significant part of his past is running an extreme risk of emotional difficulties. This is why I have such trouble with the idea of a "former ts"; "former male" I agree with, but our heritage of being **transgendered** will stay with us forever. It is not a bad heritage, but it is one that many of us have trouble accepting.

Given her rejection of her male past, I can certainly understand her difficulties and her bitterness. There is an aura of magic about surgery, and it does lead to problems. I have lost my best friend in the community to this same issue, because she does not want reminders of her past in her new life. I am one of those reminders, simply because I knew her before, and I am a part of what she no longer wants to associate with--or perhaps more to the point, what she doesn't want associated with her.

It is also a caution to all of us to be sure that our support networks are in place, and that they are truly functioning to support us. It is one thing that she had those neighboring kids calling her "sir"; it was almost certainly a taunt, destructive and mean-spirited. It takes a lot of positive support to balance these insults. But the boyfriend who wanted her to remain male--well, I don't think I need to explain to anyone here how destructive that could be, and apparently is.

It is one thing to know that we are on the right path, but few enough of us are strong enough to walk that path alone. We need our support within the community. We need our support in everyday life, too; our friends, our social circles, the people we work with, and our relationships, for those of us who have them. When those around us work against us, for whatever reason, we need to find ways to balance the negative influences, or change them, or eliminate them if necessary. No one needs to be hit over the head with a club when we are trying to come to terms with our identity, or to make the changes that are necessary to live our lives as we choose.

For G.: I've let some distance grow between myself and this community, so forgive me for not being current with your situation. There are few enough of us who pass flawlessly; the rest of us, including me, have to adapt to being read some of the time. My experience has been that it is much easier to deal with these incidents if I expect them, and if I don't make an issue of them.

Yes, sometimes they hurt. Most of the time, though, I simply don't worry about it. If it happens, it happens. I'm still me, I still know who I am, and I am still proud of the fact that I am living the life that I want to live and need to live. Getting read takes nothing away from who I am.

Over time, hormones and electrolysis do make a tremendous difference in passability. Some of us are impatient, though, and I certainly do understand that! When I was pre-everything, I didn't pass well at all, and there were some who didn't think that I ever would. But that has changed, even to the point of passing in jeans, a simple blouse or t-shirt, and no makeup.

How we feel about ourselves makes a difference in passing, too. Fully accepting ourselves as women (or men) makes a difference in how we feel about ourselves, and how we treat ourselves, and how we present ourselves to others. Other people pick up on this in subtle ways, and the most important thing that they can perceive--in terms of how they react to us--is our own self-acceptance.

It is essential to learn and to remember that we were born as women, or as men. What we have between our legs does not alter that. What other people see from the outside does not alter that. We are who we believe that we are; those feelings are too deeply rooted to be changed, ever. When the body does not match, it can set up a terrible conflict, and it is that conflict that causes us to suffer. Not our womanhood or manhood, but the conflict between mind and body. Changing our bodies is part of the resolution of that conflict. But the other part of resolving the conflict takes place in our minds, not by rejecting the gender that we feel, but simply by accepting the fact that we were given this conflict to resolve, that our experience of life will be different because of it. Not better, not worse, but different and uniquely ours.

We have every right to struggle to achieve our true identity. We have every right to be proud of what we achieve in the struggle, because we know the pain that each of us has faced, and we know that this pain has killed others. We have every reason to be proud of who we are, and that we have come to peace with this conflict, by whatever path that we need to take.

This is what **transgender pride** is about. It is about being true to ourselves, to both our true gender that has come to the surface after being buried and rejected for so long, and to our heritage, which includes the struggle and the pain, as well as the triumph. It is about taking our true place in the community, and not accepting when others see us as less than we are.

We have no reason to be ashamed of who we are. We are human, and we are strong. When we live as our true selves, other people will perceive this and understand this. Pride in ourselves is an important part of passing, because what I want in my interactions with others is to be respected, and that respect starts with me.

In another context, I wrote:

Speaking of which, in private email with another person in swlab, I mentioned that "out and proud" is something that you don't hear very much in the **trans community**.

R. responded:

Makes sense to me. I mean, I'm quite happy being lesbian. If I had a button I could press that would make me like guys, I wouldn't press it, not for anything. But being TS is a bit different. I don't think there's anything to be ashamed of, but what's to be proud of? A woman should be proud that she used to have a messed up bod that looked like a guy's?

To which I responded:

There is a lot to be proud of. I have an unusual heritage--not unique, but unique within the experience of many people who know me. Although my experience of life is different from that of single-gendered people, I know some of what it means to live as each gender. This has been useful, both to me, and to others with whom I share my life, even when the topic has little to do with what we tend to think of as gender issues.

I have learned to deal with difficult issues, both internally and in relating to others. In itself, this is something to be proud of. This, too, is something that I can share with others, because we all experience difficulties in life, and for many of us there are common problems that we face, including depression, isolation, shame, anger, and fear. Single-gendered people can and do learn from my experience, and I am happy to be able to share in ways that will improve and enrich their lives.

But pride runs deeper than that. Although I might not have chosen this life, I can truly say that I like who I am. I don't like everything that has happened in my life--who does?--but I like the person that I have become. That includes the part of me that is **transgendered**.

Being **transgendered** gives me a different outlook on life. It has given me a keen appreciation of ambiguity and irony that helps me understand so many things in this world. It has been, and continues to be, a rich source of humor, something which I need every day in order to survive. It is ambiguous, and sometimes even absurd, but then so is much of the rest of life. Being transgendered helps me to appreciate the richness of life, its diversity, its pain, and our triumphs over that pain.

What is there to be proud of? The same things that any person can be proud of--who we are, what we have made of ourselves, what we leave behind for the benefit of others. Being **transgendered** has made me a better person than I would have been otherwise, all other things being equal. Why would I not be proud of that?

firelily.com/gender/diane/tgpride.html - 2002